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ER Jim P

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(orig under Turner)

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Dear Sir:

Mr. Daniel Schorr's response to my op-ed article on the problems of secrecy in an open society is a welcome and most useful contribution to the public debate on this important issue. In a reasoned way, Mr. Schorr correctly points out that some of the leaks of secrets in recent years have proven more beneficial than harmful. If one looks only to the short term, and to whatever issue is immediately in question, I think I would agree with him. More information is always better than less in understanding and assessing any issue. Nonetheless, to base one's argument for openness on that idea alone, however appealing it may be, would be to accept the sometimes minor benefits of the short term at the expense of what may be far more important to our national welfare tomorrow. I would contend that not everyone is in the best position to judge these equities, particularly for the long term.

For example, while Philip Agee's disclosure of the names of a large number of CIA employees may have momentarily titillated the public's quite natural interest, the revelation of those names effectively ended the careers of a large number of patriotic and unquestionably dedicated American public servants, and provided every terrorist organization with a handy hit list--which, by the way, inaccurately also contained the names of individuals with no connection to the CIA. Shortly after the Agee book was published, one of the persons named in it was killed by terrorists. Was the national interest better served by these disclosures than if these names had been kept secret?

An even more serious consequence of these unilateral, uncontrolled disclosures affects our long-term capability to carry out an intelligence function for the United States. The CIA does not operate in a vacuum, nor, contrary to popular belief, is it ubiquitous.

2/001/PAL/WH/4-1/23 December 1977
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